One deep breath out from the sky

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One deep breath out from the sky

by musette22

Summary

“Hey, Buck,” Steve whispers, cautiously running a hand up and down Bucky’s back. “You feeling any better?”

Bucky doesn't answer straight away. “Think so,” he says eventually, the words slurring together with sleep or exhaustion. He stretches again, shifting on top of Steve, and –

Uh.

The low moan Bucky lets out coincides with Steve’s realization that what he can feel poking him in the hip is not, in fact, a gun, like he’d assumed a minute ago, but something altogether more incriminating. Jesus.

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Or: the fic in which Bucky gets hit with some evil Hydra gas that makes him irrationally scared at first, and insatiably horny later. Steve helps him out with both.

Notes

A post-TWS sex pollen Stucky fic? In this economy? Well yeah, of course. This was supposed to be just kinky stuff but it accidentally grew a ton of feelings, so I guess it's now technically more hurt/comfort and angsty than PWP, but hope you enjoy anyway! ❤️

Title from Hozier's incredible song I, Carrion (Icarian). With endless thanks to the most amazing and wonderful @sparkagrace for the beta help!! You're the best 💞💞

See the end of the work for more notes

“Come on, guys,” Bruce instructs, “let’s give them some space.”

Clint dutifully ducks out of the way, grabbing a couple of bottles of water from the on-board mini fridge and handing them out. “Tony? You want water?”

Tony waves dismissively. “I’ll just – be in the cockpit. Too many emotions in enclosed spaces make me want to launch myself into the sun.” He clears his throat and turns on his heel. "'Kay, cool. Wheels up in two.”

Natasha gives a terse nod. “Copy that.”

“Are we sure he’s okay?” Sam asks, eyeing Bucky with concern.

“Yeah,” Bruce sighs, running a hand through his graying curls. “He’s just going to have to go through hell first, but he’ll be okay. He’s had worse.” He winces, sending Bucky, and by extension Steve, an apologetic look before turning away to deal with his post-mission routine.

Steve grits his teeth. He knows Bruce presumably meant for that to sound reassuring, but it has the opposite effect. Even on the quinjet, it’ll take them at least six hours to get back to New York from Malaysia, since Tony still hasn’t managed to figure out how to teleport yet – which Steve privately thinks is pretty disappointing. All the more because it means that Bucky has no choice but to ride this thing out within the confines of the aircraft, with the entire team acting as an involuntary peanut gallery. The whole situation is less than ideal, to put it mildly.

“Bruce,” Steve calls once they're in the air, all too aware of the way Bucky is attempting to hide behind Steve as if he's a human shield – regardless of the fact that they’ve got no enemies here and even if they did, Bucky could probably take them out quicker than Steve could. None of that seems to be able to stop him from hissing like a feral cat, glaring daggers at anyone who comes too close, as if they hadn't been working together as a team just half an hour earlier. It’s enough to make Steve want to punch a hole right through the quinjet wall. “I’m sorry, but can you explain to me again what happened? I just want to make sure I understand.”

“Of course,” Bruce nods, a sympathetic look on his face. “Basically, while he was busy destroying that lab, Barnes inhaled something. Some sort of gas that was thrown at him by one of the lab techs before Barnes, um – took them out. Looks like it was a substance meant to temporarily incapacitate intruders, making it easier to capture and most likely manipulate and torture them. And because Hydra is Hydra, it works by instilling fear, making its victims feel irrationally anxious and scared to the point of panicking.” He scratches his head in thought. “I’m not sure if it’s helpful, but you could probably compare it to a really bad drug trip, including physical withdrawal symptoms and paranoia. It's one of their signature concoctions. I’ve seen this stuff in action once before, with non-enhanced individuals. It's not lethal and doesn’t have any long term effects that I know of, but I'm sorry to say it is going to be pretty unpleasant for a while.”

Maybe Steve should be grateful. Relieved that this thing, whatever it is, isn't going to kill Bucky, but that doesn't stop him from feeling sick to his stomach about it. For a moment, he thinks he may actually throw up, nevermind that he hasn't done that a single time since he got the serum.

It's just so damn *cruel*, he thinks bitterly. Bucky only recently stopped jumping at loud noises and needing to have an exit in his direct line of sight at all times, finally able to sleep through the night more times than not. And in the scope of a single afternoon, it's like he's taken fifty steps backwards.

And the thing that makes it worse, the thing that makes it *so much worse,* is that once again, Hydra is responsible. Despite the fact that he just took out a considerable number of Hydra operatives during the mission – which, apart from Bucky's plight, had been successful – Steve really wishes he could take out a couple more. Ideally all of them, and ruthlessly.

"How long?" Steve bites out. He's aware it's not Bruce's fault, but it's tough keeping the anger out of his tone all the same.

"Difficult to say. Barnes is enhanced, so it's possible it won't last as long as it did for the regular humans I've seen it happen to before. But my guess is it'll take a while. Definitely several hours and probably even until after we've arrived in New York."

Steve clenches his jaw so hard it makes an ominous clicking sound. "So, what? He's just going to be terrified out of his mind until this stuff leaves his system?"

Alarmingly, Bruce hesitates then, his eyes flitting from Steve to the floor, the quinjet doors, and finally to a spot just over Steve's right shoulder.

"What is it?" Steve asks, watching Bruce's face closely. "Is there more?"

"Well…" Bruce still won't meet Steve's eyes. "The way it develops… It's possible there's going to be a second phase. But if there is, I'm pretty sure it won't happen until we're back home, at least."

"A second phase?" Steve echoes, his unease growing rapidly. "What happens in the second phase?"

"I don't think it's helpful at this point to get into specifics," Bruce hedges. "There's really no telling if it'll happen, or if it does, when it might hit. But let's just say it's probably best that you get him somewhere private once we arrive. It's nothing too dangerous, I can tell you that, it's just…" He plants his hands on his hips, giving Steve a grim smile. "Well, like I said, let's just see if it even comes to that, Barnes' system might metabolize the substance differently after all. In the meantime, all we can do is be there for him and make sure he feels as safe as he possibly can under the circumstances."

Part of Steve wants to press the issue, wants to make Bruce tell him everything he knows, anything that could help them in this situation, but before he can, Bucky lets out sound like a kicked dog – high-pitched and unnatural, making the hairs on the back of Steve's neck stand up. If he was hiding behind Steve's back before, now Bucky is downright clinging to him,

fingers curling into the straps on Steve's uniform and holding on for dear life. Steve's attention snaps to him instantly, all thoughts of viciously murdering Nazi scum taking a backseat for the moment.

"Hey. Hey, sshhh," he says, trying to keep his voice low and soothing, careful not to spook Bucky any further than he already is. "You're okay, Buck. You're alright. It's just drugs making you feel this way. It's going to pass soon, okay? No one is going to hurt you, I'll make sure of that."

Bucky's only response is a miserable whimper. He doesn't relax – if anything, he just clings tighter, fingers digging into Steve's shoulders hard enough to hurt, though it's nothing compared to the ache in Steve's chest. Bucky just sounds so *scared*.

"Why isn't he afraid of me?" Steve asks, the thought suddenly occurring to him. He looks back at Bruce. "You said this stuff made him scared of everything, but he isn't, not of me."

Bruce hums thoughtfully. "I'm not entirely sure why that is. I would've expected him to be scared of you too, now that you mention it."

"I know you're not askin' me," Sam speaks up from where he's already strapped into one of the seats lining the walls, "and I'm not a scientist or even a real therapist, but I did take a couple of psychology classes back in college. And for what it's worth – my best guess as to why Barnes is somehow still able to recognise that you're not a threat is that he associates you so strongly with safety, that even this substance, whatever it is, isn't able to overrule that. That, and maybe that he views you as an extension of himself in a way."

Oh. Steve's heart thuds heavily in his chest, once, twice, feeling like it's overflowing and breaking at the same time. It's a curious sensation.

"Right," he says, his voice hoarse. "That's – yeah, okay." Swallowing past the lump in his throat, he takes a deep breath and sets his jaw, forcibly pulling himself together. Now's not the time for emotional breakdowns. He can try to process all that later, when Bucky isn't in agony.

"Hey, Buck?" he asks lightly. "Can you let go for just a second? I'm not going anywhere, I promise. I'm just gonna turn around, alright?"

To his relief, Steve can feel Bucky give a shaky nod against his back. Careful not to startle him, Steve slowly turns around in his hold, though once he sees the look on Bucky's face, he almost wishes he hadn't. The abject fear and panic mixed with a childlike, pleading confusion is worse than anything he could've anticipated. Bucky's eyes are so wide and fearful, his skin unnaturally pale, his bottom lip trembling noticeably. It's enough to break Steve's heart clean down the middle, then tear it out of his chest and stomp on it for good measure.

"Oh, Buck," he sighs, wrapping his arms around Bucky's tense shoulders and pulling him closer. Bucky makes a tiny sound, arms wrapping around Steve's middle and squeezing him right back, so tightly he would've cracked a rib in someone not-enhanced.

Steve closes his eyes and tries really hard not to think about how this is the first time they've hugged in months. About how, after Bucky came back, things had begun to look up, until out of the blue, Bucky had started to retreat again. Becoming more distant instead of less, like the previous weeks hadn't happened at all. Steve hadn't known why – he still doesn't, let alone what to do about it – but every time he'd asked if something was wrong, Bucky had deflected. Assured him that he was fine, that he was doing much better, and the distinct decrease in nightmares and dissociative episodes seemed to corroborate that.

In fact, if Steve was being painfully honest with himself, it seemed like it was mostly *Steve* that Bucky was keeping his distance from. Bucky seemed to be doing alright with the rest of the team, looking more and more at ease around them as the months went by. He even met up for tea with Natasha occasionally and had a weekly appointment with Clint at the shooting range. But whenever Steve tried to coax Bucky into spending time with him, be it sparring down in the gym or just hanging out at Steve's apartment to watch a movie or have dinner together, Bucky had always come up with some excuse.

Steve tried not to let it upset him, really he did. Because Bucky doing things with the others was still progress. It was still a sign that he was doing better.

But it also *hurt*. Like a sonofabitch. All Steve wanted to do, all he could think about most days ever since finding out Bucky was alive, was to be there for Bucky, help him in any way that he could. To just *be* with him, if nothing else. And yet, that seemed to be exactly what Bucky didn't want. Steve wasn't sure what he'd done wrong – though he had one or two suspicions – but he wasn't going to force Bucky to explain. No one was going to force Bucky to do anything ever again, not if Steve had anything to say about it. Bucky would tell him if he wanted to, and in the meantime, Steve had no choice but to bear the renewed loss of his best friend in silence.

Now, though. Now, Bucky is clinging to him like Steve is a lone lifebuoy on a stormy sea, and it's so much like Steve has been dreaming of, and yet nothing like that at all. It's like someone took his heart's desire and turned it into something grotesque, reflecting it back at him in a broken funhouse mirror. Having Bucky in his arms will never not feel right, but right now, Steve would give it up without a second thought if it meant Bucky would stop shaking and whimpering and smelling like fear. God, he'd give anything to make it stop. He'd take Bucky's place in a heartbeat, no questions asked. From the minute he'd heard the words *Barnes is compromised,* Steve's been fervently wishing he could go back in time and offer to take the labs instead. But Bucky insisted, and Steve has always had a hard time telling him no. He's always been weak where Bucky Barnes is concerned.

And now look where it got them.

What's really killing Steve, though, is that he'd promised himself. He'd *promised* himself that he wouldn't ever let anyone harm a hair on Bucky's head again for as long as they both lived. That he would keep Bucky safe from Hydra's filthy tentacles and burn the entire wretched organization to the ground until there was nothing left but bones and ashes and cinders. The way he'd failed to do the first time around.

Yet once again, Bucky is in agony at Hydra's hands, and once again, Steve failed to protect him. Even though Steve knows Bruce wouldn't lie to him, and that whatever's happening to

Bucky really is temporary and non-lethal, Steve still feels like he should be falling to his knees to beg for Bucky's forgiveness.

Steve has to make a concentrated effort to push down his own emotions one more time, forcing himself to stay in the here and now so he can attend to Bucky's needs instead. He can rage and seethe later, when he's alone. Right now, his priority is to radiate as much calmness and steadiness as he can. He may not have been there for Bucky when he should've been, but he can damn well be there for him now.

Bucky whimpers again, still latched on to him in a way that suggests he's not going to let go anytime soon. When Steve pulls back just far enough to catch a glimpse of his face, Bucky's eyes are darting about anxiously, almost crazed.

"They're coming –" Bucky whispers harshly, sweat beading at his hairline. "They're- oh God, I can't go back, I *can't* –"

"Shhh." Steve wraps a hand around the back of Bucky's neck, pressing their foreheads together to try and catch Bucky's unfocused eyes. "Look at me. Hey, look at me. I got you, Buck. No one's coming for you. You're safe, I promise. I *promise*."

Bucky doesn't even seem to hear him, doesn't stop trying to crawl inside of Steve, clinging so tightly he's starting to constrict Steve's blood flow. He just keeps crowding closer, pushing Steve backwards in an attempt to get away from his imaginary assailants. When Steve's back hits the wall, the only way from there is down, so he sinks to the floor, taking Bucky with him. Bucky immediately proceeds to climb into his lap, wrapping himself around him like he's trying to disappear through him, or perhaps merge them into one. He's heavy, easily as heavy as Steve is, with the metal arm, but Steve barely feels it.

Mindless, soothing noises pour from his lips as he strokes Bucky's back, gently squeezing the back of his neck every time his breathing becomes more labored. Bucky's heart beats inside his ribcage like a frightened, cornered bird; fast and erratic where his chest is pressed up against Steve's, and Steve's own heart aches in sympathy.

"It's alright, Buck," Steve murmurs. "I've got you. It's gonna pass soon, I swear."

With a small, pained noise, Bucky buries his nose in the crook of Steve's neck, his entire body trembling. "Please don't leave me," he whispers, barely audibly, like he's afraid anyone else might hear. "Please, I'm scared, Steve, don't –" He tenses, voice cracking, "No – *no,* please, *please*."

Steve didn't think his heart could break any further, but apparently he was wrong. Tears burning hot behind his eyes, he bites the inside of his cheek hard enough to draw blood. "I'm not leavin' you, Buck," Steve vows, and he doesn't care how many times he's got to say it. "I'm not going anywhere. I'm gonna stay right here until you feel better, alright? Not goin' anywhere."

He's not sure if Bucky even hears him, but he'll keep repeating it just in case. Keep hoping the meaning of his words will somehow get through to him.

They stay there like that for what feels like a very long time; Bucky clinging to Steve like a lifeline and Steve comforting him to the best of his admittedly limited ability. Around them, the others are trying to give them as much privacy as they're able in such a small space. Occasionally, though, Steve can feel their eyes on them, their gazes full of sympathy, of pity. Steve can't blame them. They must make a pretty pitiful pair right now.

After a while, just as Steve is starting to wonder if perhaps the worst is finally over, Bucky suddenly goes rigid in his arms and lets out what can only be described as a wail when a wave of renewed panic seems to wash over him. He clutches frantically at Steve, probably not even sure himself what he's trying to achieve except needing to claw at *something.* They tumble down together in a tangle of limbs until they're stretched out on the floor and there is literally nowhere else for them to go. To make matters worse, Bucky then starts to thrash. His arms and legs flail in fear and desperation as he chokes out unintelligible cries for help.

"Bucky," Steve says urgently, anxiously. "Buck, please, calm down. You're gonna hurt yourself. Bucky, *calm down*."

But Bucky doesn't listen, doesn't even seem to hear him, and Steve doesn't know what to *do*. He's usually good in a crisis, but not so much when it's this personal. He's supposed to be better now, goddammit; stronger, more powerful, and yet he feels completely helpless in the face of his best friend's agony. Steve's own agitation grows when, from the corner of his eye, he can see the others start to tense up, getting ready to jump in if needed. While Steve appreciates the sentiment, that's something he wants to avoid at all cost. Things are bad enough as it is without Bucky getting jumped on by a bunch of superheroes.

Frazzled and worried, Steve tries the first thing that pops into his head: he pushes back, rolling them over until he's on top of Bucky and caging him in with his arms on either side of Bucky's head. He fervently hopes it'll make him feel safer rather than trapped, and to his utter relief, it seems to work. Bucky thrashes for a little while longer, but by and by, the wailing subsides, the spasms easing into tremors. He still clings to Steve, but less desperately so. His breathing slows down in increments, heart rate lowering from its earlier jackrabbiting.

For the first several minutes, Steve's muscles remain tense in anticipation of another panic attack. But when a quarter of an hour passes without things re-escalating, he gradually allows himself to relax, in tandem with Bucky slowly but surely easing his deathgrip on Steve.

Finally, after what feels like an age, Bucky lets out a shuddering sigh as the last of the tension seems to drain from his limbs. Steve waits a while longer before he dares to move, then gently flips them over again. This way, Bucky is draped on top of him and in a position where he's free to do whatever he wants. Bucky whimpers a little, but otherwise doesn't object to being jostled and moved around, just like he doesn't seem to be in any rush to detach himself from Steve. He just stays where he is, draped over him like a heavily weighted blanket, nose buried in the crook of Steve's neck.

Eventually, Bucky's breathing evens out, hitched breaths morphing into soft puffs of air that brush Steve's skin, and then finally, blessedly, he's asleep. The only reason Steve doesn't cry with relief is because he doesn't want to risk waking Bucky up again by weeping all over

him. He focuses on Bucky's deep, steady breaths instead and pulls himself together one more time, fervently hoping for this ordeal to be over soon.

After a few minutes, Sam's low voice breaks the silence. "You doing okay there, Steve?"

Steve does a quick inventory, the way he's accustomed to when he's fresh out of battle. He isn't really hurt anywhere; nowhere except his heart, which feels tender and bruised and is still in the process of slowing down after his system had primed itself for a fight that never came. But he's getting there. He's alright, as long as Bucky will be, too.

"I'm okay," he confirms quietly, his voice coming out thick. "He's asleep."

"Good," Bruce says kindly. "Just let him sleep it off. He'll be alright, Steve."

Steve gives a brief nod. "Thanks, Bruce."

For the next hour or so, Bucky sleeps like the dead. A glance to his left tells Steve the others are in a similar state; eyes closed and heads lolling, as everyone finally gives in to the post-mission exhaustion.

Steve must drift off at some point too, because a while later, he's awakened from a light slumber by Bucky starting to stir.

Humming softly, Bucky stretches on top of him, then burrows in even closer than before, burying his nose in that spot below Steve's ear. Steve swallows reflexively and takes a deep, steadying breath. Tries to focus on the discomfort of the weapons still strapped to Bucky's body that are currently digging into his flesh in uncomfortable places, instead of the goosebumps erupting across his skin.

"Hey, Buck," Steve whispers, cautiously running a hand up and down Bucky's back. "You feeling any better?"

Bucky doesn't answer straight away, seeming to think about it for a long moment. "Think so," he says eventually, the words slurring together with sleep or exhaustion. He stretches again, shifting on top of Steve, and –

Uh.

The low moan Bucky lets out coincides with Steve's realization that what he can feel poking him in the hip is not, in fact, a gun, like he'd assumed a minute ago, but something altogether more incriminating. *Jesus*.

"Um, Buck?" Steve squeaks, trying very hard not to flinch away from him. "Do you – *ah* – do you think you could get up yet?"

Bucky doesn't reply. He just makes another soft sound and rolls his hips, and – oh *fuck,* now it's Steve's turn to start panicking. Please, God. This can't happen. Not here, not ever.

Because the truth – a truth he's been trying to hide so hard and for so long it's become second nature to him – is that Steve Rogers has loved Bucky Barnes with everything he's got for as

long as he can remember. The truth is that he has wanted Bucky in every way imaginable ever since puberty hit, and nothing has ever been able to change that. Not the serum, not Bucky's fall, not seventy years in the ice. Since Bucky came back, Steve's guilt-ridden relief and worry about his best friend have meant that the desire had taken a backseat, but it wasn't gone. It would never be gone, and Steve will never stop dreaming about being close to Bucky in the way he's certain Bucky can never, ever know about.

Now, with Bucky draped all over him, rubbing leisurely against him like he doesn't even realize he's doing it, the situation is suddenly starting to look a little too much like the private fantasies Steve's indulged in far more times than he should have. And Steve wants it, *God* does he want it, but what's more important – Bucky *doesn't.* Bucky is just souped up on something awful and Steve's body has absolutely no business responding the way it is to some involuntary physical reaction of Bucky's.

With all the gentleness he can muster in his half-panicked state, Steve tries to coax Bucky into getting off of him. "Come on, Buck. Let's get up off the ground, huh? We'll be more comfortable sitting down, let's – *ah* – let's get you some water or something, okay buddy?"

But of course, because Steve's life is just a long series of cruel twists of fate, Bucky doesn't budge. He just sighs out a soft *please* and clings harder, stubbornly resisting Steve's efforts to – gently – push him off. Steve's mind races, frantically running through scenarios and possibilities, trying to make sense of what's going on, but unfortunately, it seems that most of his blood is being diverted south at the moment, in the opposite direction of his brain. It makes thinking somewhat challenging. Is Bucky still asleep, unaware of what he's doing? But no, Bucky spoke to him, answered his question. So why is he acting this way? And more importantly, why isn't he *stopping*?

"Buck – what's going on?" Steve asks finally, at a loss. "How can I help? What – what do you need?"

In lieu of replying, Bucky rolls his hips and moans again, louder than before, the sound unmistakable for anything other than what it is.

And suddenly, Steve *knows.*

Bruce's earlier comments about a second phase finally click, slotting into place like puzzle pieces. The realization crashes through him, filling in the blanks, and then Steve just – goes still. Steve Rogers, one the foremost tactical minds of his generation, freezes up and simply lets his best friend writhe on top of him, because quite frankly, he doesn't have a clue what to do now.

Bucky rocks down against Steve in obvious search of friction, and Steve wonders hysterically whether he should be offering Bucky his thigh to rub against. What's the etiquette for when your best friend is high on some evil, libido-enhancing drug and is using you to get off? He doesn't remember this being part of any SHIELD training.

To make matters worse, despite his very best efforts, Steve is inevitably starting to get hard too, the situation becoming more and more precarious with every roll of Bucky's hips. Hoping against hope, Steve wonders if perhaps if he stays still enough and lets Bucky get this

– whatever it is – out of his system, that that'll be it, and they can just pretend none of this ever happened –

But of course, Steve should've known that it would never be that easy. Because that's when the rest of the team rouses, woken up by Bucky's increasingly loud exclamations of pleasure.

"What in the hell," Clint says emphatically, once he's taken stock of what's happening. Steve privately thinks that's a pretty accurate assessment of the situation.

"Oh, boy," Bruce mutters, putting his glasses back on and blinking at the scene in front of him.

"Uh," Steve offers eloquently. He knows he's blushing like crazy, but there's not a single thing he can do about it – not with Bucky's moans ringing in his ears and his erection mercilessly rubbing up against Steve's own. "I'm assuming this is what you were, *ah*, talking about earlier?"

Bruce lets out a weary sigh. "Unfortunately, yes. I thought he wouldn't get to this stage until we were back in New York, if he did at all. The last time I saw someone under the influence of this stuff, this part didn't hit them until the next day. But it kind of makes sense, I suppose. Barnes appears to have a similar enhanced metabolism to yours, so he's burning through it faster, speeding up the process."

"Right. So, um. What- what should I do- *ooh*?" Steve has to swallow a moan of his own when Bucky thrusts down in a particularly effective way. Oh, Christ. This is divine punishment for all the times Steve was reckless with his own life, he's sure of it.

"That's up to you," Bruce tells him, shifting in his seat. He sounds distinctly uncomfortable, even though he's clearly doing his best to be as professional as possible. "If you want, we can try to separate you and see what happens. It's probably going to be very unpleasant for him, but it won't kill him. The alternative is to, uh, let him get it out of his system until he's exhausted himself and falls asleep again."

"But if he's anything like me, that'll take a while," Steve chokes out. Not exactly something he's keen to discuss in front of the team, but honestly, that's the least of his worries right now.

Bruce grimaces. "Yeah, I'd say so."

By this point, Bucky is actively humping him, making soft, pleased sounds that Steve selfishly wants to hoard, storing them away in some secret little brain compartment to revisit later. At the same time, though, he could've *really* done without the knowledge of what it's like to be unbelievably mortified in a helplessly turned on kind of way.

"Okay," Steve swallows, lifting his arms before uselessly dropping them down to his sides again. "Well, um. I guess I'll just…"

"Steve," Natasha says. She doesn't raise her voice, but the urgency in it is unmistakable. "Listen, I know you want to help him, but he'll understand if you draw the line here. Maybe not right now, but he will once he's recovered. Just say the word and we can try to get him off

you, okay? We can find something to distract him with for as long as it takes for his body to burn through this stuff." After a pause, she adds in a more gentle tone, "You don't have to do this."

The '*no matter what you think you owe him'* is implied, because Natasha, unfortunately, knows him all too well.

Part of Steve thinks maybe they *should* put a stop to this now before it escalates any further. He hates that Bucky is being forced to be so vulnerable in front of all of them, especially considering how private he is these days. And even if he wasn't, this isn't something anyone would want to happen to them in public. It's humiliating. Dehumanizing. As if Bucky hadn't had enough of that already.

There's also the added complication that Steve himself constitutes in this situation. Not only is he Bucky's oldest friend, but he's also a man. Much as Steve wishes he did, Bucky doesn't want him like this – or any man, for that matter. Never has, never will. Bucky just isn't like Steve, and the mere thought of seeing regret or even disgust on Bucky's face when he comes to his senses and realizes what happened is enough to make Steve want to curl up into a tiny ball of misery and never resurface.

The fact that he can't deny that a tiny, perverted part of him is actually *excited* about what's happening just makes matters so much worse. It shouldn't be happening like this, of course, but his body doesn't seem to have gotten the memo. His mind may not want the sparks of pleasure that shoot up his spine, or the pleasant throb of his cock, heavy in his tac pants, but his body wants *more*. Despite the fact that his reaction is involuntary, Steve can't help but feel like he's taking advantage of Bucky, and when he's at his most vulnerable, too. Hell, he probably deserves Bucky's loathing.

The more insistent Bucky's movements become, the more desperate Steve gets. "Come on, Buck," he chokes, sitting up in a last-ditch attempt to get Bucky off him on his own. "You're alright, huh? We've just gotta –"

But before he's even finished his sentence, Bucky lets out a sudden, harsh cry. His earlier almost absentminded movements suddenly take on a frantic air and he locks his legs around Steve's waist to grind down even harder, making Steve momentarily see stars.

"Please," Bucky breathes, mouthing at Steve's neck. "Steve, please. Oh, God. I *need* –"

And Jesus, how on earth Steve is supposed to deny Bucky anything, let alone something he so desperately needs? However great his own uneasiness may be right now, it's clearly nothing compared to Bucky's. Separating them by force would mean Bucky would have to sit this one out alone, and in serious discomfort, too. That's just not something Steve could ever be okay with. Besides, Steve made a promise to stay with Bucky and he's not about to go back on his word just because of a little self-loathing. Not like that's really anything new, anyway.

"It's okay," Steve finally tells Natasha, resigned. "If this is what he needs right now…" He briefly closes his eyes. "It– it's just the drugs, he won't – I'm fine, I promise. Just maybe, um. Put in some headphones and look the other way for a while?"

“Jesus,” Sam mutters, dragging a hand across his face. “Alright, you know what, I’m just gonna keep Tony company in the cockpit. Anyone else wanna join, be my guest.”

The minute he gets up, Nat, Bruce and Clint follow suit, hastily making their way to the door separating the jet’s cabin from the front of the plane.

“Just shout if you need help, okay?” Natasha tells him, eyes briefly drifting to where Bucky is grinding down on Steve. She mutters something in Russian before abruptly turning around and disappearing into the cockpit.

“Will do,” Steve lies at her retreating back. “Thanks, guys.”

As soon as the door to the cockpit closes, Bucky’s urgency seems to double, as though he’d been trying to hold back even in his drugged up haze.

“Steve,” Bucky groans, his breath hot against Steve’s throat. “Fuck, sorry. I'm sorry, I don’t – I *can’t*…”

“Hey, no.” Steve swallows hard and closes his eyes. “It's okay, Buck. Go ahead. Take what you need.”

“Oh, God,” Bucky rasps – and then it's like a dam breaks. He starts rubbing himself on Steve in earnest, panting harshly as he chases whatever he’s needing. His erection, where it presses into the crease between Steve’s thigh and groin, is hard and so hot it seems to be burning right through their tac gear, searing Steve’s skin. Steve grits his teeth and wills himself not to move. Not to give into his instincts screaming at him to follow Bucky’s movements.

He doesn't know whether to be relieved or disappointed that it doesn’t take much longer before Bucky’s breath hitches in a telltale way. With a final, drawn out groan, Bucky stiffens above him for several long seconds, before going completely boneless, all but collapsing on top of him.

Steve has to ball his hands into fists at his sides to keep from reaching out and touching, his blunt fingernails digging into his palm hard enough to draw blood. He already knows he’s not going to forget those sounds for as long as he lives. But hey, what's one more life-altering thing he's just going to have to learn to live with to add to all the others?

Once the echoes of the moans and the ringing in his ears have subsided, Steve takes a deep breath and tries to ignore the insistent, near painful throbbing in his groin.

“Feeling better?” he asks, his voice sounding rough to his own ears.

Bucky hums contentedly, but makes no attempt to move. Steve idly wonders if he should say anything else. Do something, maybe. Does Bucky want to clean up? Cuddle? Was that it, or is there more on the way? To his eternal shame, he can’t seem to decide which option would be better. His question is answered less than a minute later when Bucky shifts again, exhaling shakily as he starts to move his hips in small circles, seemingly unconsciously.

“Oh, fuck,” Bucky mutters, so softly it would've gotten lost in the low hum of the aircraft if not for Steve's enhanced hearing. Lifting his head, Bucky then puts his hands, both flesh and metal, on Steve’s chest and pushes himself up, giving him leverage to grind down even harder. Hot, sharp pleasure radiates out from his groin and –

Steve moans.

It’s completely involuntary and utterly mortifying, even more so when Bucky instantly stills, staring down at Steve with wide, shocked eyes.

Despite his burning shame, Steve can’t look away. Bucky looks… *Christ,* he's so beautiful. His long, dark hair is disheveled, a pink flush high on his cheeks, his lips parted, slick and red. Suddenly, Steve is hit with a powerful echo of a moment on another aircraft, a year or so ago, when he and Bucky had found themselves in a similar position. This time, though, Bucky's eyes aren't filled with panic and fury, no trace of that terrible blankness that still haunts Steve's dreams sometimes. Right now, Bucky’s pupils are so dilated that the black has almost entirely drowned out the elusive color of his irises. He looks wrecked, yes, but in a painfully sensual way, and the sight combined with the feeling of Bucky’s still very present erection rubbing against Steve’s own makes Steve feel like he's about to lose whatever is left of his already frayed sanity.

Before Steve can apologize, explain, *anything*, Bucky's eyes suddenly roll back. His mouth drops open as a broken moan falls from his lips, and he grinds down *hard* , hard enough to make sparks fly behind Steve’s eyelids. Steve can't help it – with another involuntary sound, his hips buck up of their own accord, chasing the glorious friction.

“*Oh,*” he groans, as pleasure rolls through him, sharp and joyous.

“Steve, *yeah,*” Bucky gasps – almost as if he *likes* it.

Helplessly, Steve moans again, his body arching up against Bucky’s. The next thing he knows, they’re both panting, rocking into each other, movements growing increasingly desperate and uncoordinated. Heat pools at the base of Steve's spine at an alarming rate, coming in like the tide; unstoppable and inevitable. And he tries, God, he tries so hard to hold back, but it’s no use – when Bucky moans his name again, Steve is done for. With a helpless sound, his vision whiting out with the force of it, his climax hits him like a freight train. He’s fairly certain that Bucky comes again too as he shoots off inside his tac pants, making a mess of his SHIELD-issued underwear.

Steve is no stranger to orgasms, but he can't recall an instance where the satisfaction felt this right, this bone-deep. For a moment, the only sound in the room apart from the rumble of the aircraft is their ragged breathing; the only things Steve can feel an all-encompassing, glowing contentment and Bucky’s comfortingly heavy weight draped over him.

It's bliss.

Right up until reality catches up with him.

From one moment to the next, Steve's entire body stiffens, flushing hot with shame and mortification. No. Oh, *no.* This wasn't supposed to happen.

"I'm sorry," he says, the same limbs that had felt featherlight and tingly a minute ago suddenly leaden, deadweights attached to his giant, useless body. "Buck, I'm *so* sorry, I shouldn't have – I can't, I didn't mean to –"

Bucky makes a pained sound, lifting himself up an inch or so. "Steve, no – it – it's okay." His voice is hoarse, but he still sounds more like himself than he has for hours now. *"I* should be – *Jesus,* I can't believe I just –" He breaks off, shuddering. "I'm so fucking sorry."

Steve doesn't need him to elaborate to know what's going through Bucky's mind. The way he must be torturing himself about being no better than the people who did things to him against his will, and Steve just can't let him go on thinking like that.

"Stop," Steve says, pulling himself together as best he can. "This is nothing like that, Buck, please don't blame yourself for this. You're not feeling like yourself right now, that's all. You've got nothing to be sorry for, you hear me?"

Bucky opens his mouth to reply, but before he can say a word, another full-body shiver runs through him, head to toe. "Oh," he groans, tensing up again. "Oh shit, here we go again."

Squaring his shoulders, Steve mentally prepares for another round. "We'll get you through this," he swears, glad to find he sounds more confident than he feels. "It's gonna be okay, Buck, don't fight it, alright?"

Bucky doesn't answer. He's squirming, whimpering like he can't get comfortable. "Oh, fuck. Steve… *Steve*, can you – I need –"

"What is it?"

"Touch me," Bucky gasps. "Please, can you – St- Steve, *please.*"

Steve's stomach lurches violently, conflicting emotions surging through him strongly enough to leave him reeling. "Oh," he says, voice coming out somewhat strangled. He draws a shaky breath. "Yeah. Okay, I – Whatever you need."

Careful to telegraph his intentions, he moves to flip them over again so that Bucky is lying on the floor below him, though that's about as far as he gets before needing more instruction. He hovers over Bucky uncertainly, terrified he'll do something Bucky doesn't want. "What do you, uh. You need me to..?"

"Yeah, *yes*," Bucky pants, hips bucking up, eyes unfocused. "C'mon, just –"

"Right, okay." Steve sets his jaw and reaches down between them, setting his fingers to work on the buckles and straps of Bucky's tac pants. There are a lot of straps, and the more of them he undoes, the more his heart feels like it's about to pound right out of his chest. When he tugs down the final zipper, allowing him to push his pants down a little and reveal Bucky's black, tented briefs, he almost feels the need to cross himself, nevermind that he hasn't really

prayed for years. With a final bolstering breath, Steve slides his hand into Bucky's underwear; past damp fabric, over soft skin and a trail of fine hair.

The minute Steve's fingers tentatively curl around his length, Bucky lets out a low, obscene groan.

"*Fuck.* That's – yeah *, Steve.*"

Steve's blood is roaring in his ears so loudly he's surprised he can still hear anything at all. Bucky is hot and hard in his hand, wet and messy, and *God* , Steve is going to hell for thinking this is the most arousing thing that's ever happened to him. But it's happening now anyway, so he starts to stroke Bucky's cock, figuring it out as he goes. Bucky clings to him desperately, grabbing at the straps of Steve's uniform like he's trying to keep him close, *closer.*

It's the sweetest kind of torture. Everything in Steve is screaming out for Bucky – his chest thrumming with longing, lips aching with the need to kiss him, to show him how loved he is, how wanted. But that's not what this is about. This isn't about what Steve wants – it's about what Bucky needs from him right now, nothing more, nothing less.

"*F-fuck*," Bucky whimpers, his voice reedy, laced with something that doesn't seem to be just pleasure. "Oh God, please, I'm – Steve, 'm sorry."

"How many times do I gotta tell you, Buck? It's not your fault."

"But I –" Bucky chokes out, "Steve, you don't –"

"Don't worry about me," Steve cuts him off, gentle but firm. "I'm here to give you whatever you need. I *want* to help you, you understand?" It's dangerously close to an admission he can't ever tell Bucky outright, but it's what Bucky needs to hear right now, so it's worth the risk.

Bucky shakes his head, like he's still trying to hold back despite Steve's reassurances, until suddenly, he gasps, "*Faster*. Steve, faster, *please.*"

Steve obliges, because how could he not? He tightens his grip on Bucky's cock, his fist moving quickly and relentlessly, jerking him off until Bucky's harsh breathing turns into shallow panting and his cries into helpless moans.

"Come on," Steve murmurs, raptly watching Bucky's familiar features, now screwed up in pleasure. "Let go, Buck. Just let go for me, c'mon."

Almost on command, Bucky's eyes roll back. "Steve," he breathes, tensing below him.

"That's it," Steve encourages, "yeah, come on" – and then Bucky groans, back arching as he spills warmly over Steve's hand.

For a few moments, they stay just like that, catching their breaths, while Steve tries really hard not to think about what exactly just happened or how his own aching cock feels about it.

But the respite is only temporary; it's just a few minutes before Bucky starts squirming again.

“Oh,” Bucky says unhappily. “Oh, no.”

Steve inhales. “Again?”

“Yeah… I – Oh fuck, I’m sor-”

“Don’t you dare,” Steve growls, fighting the urge to press a kiss to Bucky’s sweat-damp forehead. “Don’t you dare apologize again, Buck. We’re gonna get through this, okay? You ‘n me.”

“You – you don’t have to do this, Steve –”

“I’m not leavin’ you, Bucky. No way.”

“But you can’t just –”

“The hell I can't,” Steve says. “I can do this all day.”

Bucky groans, gritting his teeth. “Stubborn goddamn p-punk.”

Relieved that Bucky is feeling enough like himself to scold him, Steve flashes him a grim smile. “Damn right. Now tell me what you need.”

“I don’t… I don’t know, it’s –” Bucky shakes his head, again and again, as if trying to dispel a distressing thought. “Oh shit, it’s not going – *f-fuck.*”

“What is it?” Steve frowns. “Buck, what’s going on?”

“I don’t know,” Bucky says again, grimacing in obvious discomfort. He moans.

Steve tenses, heart rate picking up. “Buck, come on, you’re worrying me. What’s wrong?”

“It – *ah*, fuck. It aches,” Bucky gasps. “I can’t… It *hurts.*”

“What hurts?” Steve insists, frantically looking Bucky over. Involuntary, his stomach flips when he catches a glimpse of Bucky’s cock, the tip of it messy and red where it’s peeking out of his opened tac pants. “What is it, what’s wrong? Talk to me, Bucky, please.”

Bucky whimpers again, eyes squeezed shut, and right, that's it – Steve is officially starting to panic. If Bucky Barnes, the guy who endured more physical pain than anyone he knows, tells him he’s hurting, something is definitely wrong. He makes to get up, intending to fetch Bruce from the cockpit, but before he can, Bucky’s hand shoots out and clamps down on the back of Steve’s neck. His palm is damp, fingers digging hard into Steve’s skin.

“Don’t leave me,” he rasps. “Please, you- you promised.”

Steve's heart contracts painfully. “Okay,” he concedes, sinking back down to the floor again. “Okay, I won’t. But you gotta tell me what’s wrong, Bucky. *Please*.”

Bucky’s eyes are wild, his throat working as he swallows. “I think – I need –”

“*What?* What do you need?”

“Need… *you*, I’m –”

Steve’s eyes flit across Bucky’s face, trying to find some clue to go off. “I’m here, I’m – what can I do? Should I touch you again?”

In lieu of replying, Bucky shifts, lifting his legs and wrapping them around Steve’s waist before doing a full-body roll against him that has Steve biting back an involuntary moan.

“Need *you* –” Bucky chokes out again, hips thrusting upwards against Steve's with intent, and *oh* –

Steve damn near blacks out for a second or two, his brain utterly failing to process the unspecified but unmistakable request. There’s a faint ringing in his ears that’s getting louder by the second, and he stares at Bucky with his mouth hanging open for longer than the situation really allows – until Bucky lets out an agonizing cry, finally shocking Steve out of his daze.

“Alright,” Steve says brusquely, shifting into battle mode, “I got you, Buck. I got you.” He sits up, leaning back to get better access to Bucky’s lower half. “So, uh, I’m gonna just… get these down, okay?” He tugs meaningfully on Bucky’s pants to make sure he knows what’s happening.

Bucky just nods, biting down on his bottom lip hard enough to turn it white. Curling his fingers around the waistband, Steve waits till Bucky lifts his hips to pull down Bucky's tac pants, taking his briefs with them. He pulls them down Bucky's legs until they get caught on his chunky black boots. Bucky makes an impatient sound when Steve starts to unlace them, so Steve makes sure to be as quick about it as his shaking hands allow. Tugging off Bucky's boots and socks, he throws them aside before finally getting his pants off all the way, too.

Until that moment, Steve has been studiously avoiding looking anywhere above Bucky's knees, but he knows he can't put it off any longer.

He glances up and swallows hard, his stomach swooping dangerously. While Bucky’s upper half is still dressed in foreboding leather, his lower half is completely bare. He looks vulnerable like this, but not helpless – his cut waist with the pronounced iliac crest, his powerful thighs, his – oh, God – big, rock-hard cock, still curving up towards his belly despite the three times he’s already come.

When Bucky groans again, letting his legs fall open meaningfully, Steve remembers what he’s supposed to be doing. What he cannot *believe* he’s about to do, and Lord, he can’t let himself think about it too hard in this moment, or he’ll either combust or have a total breakdown. He huffs out a quick, hard breath and settles himself between Bucky’s spread

thighs. “I’m gonna touch you now, okay, Buck? If I do anything you don’t want me to, you have to tell me.”

“Just – do it.”

“Yeah. Yeah, okay.” Mind racing, Steve tries to decide how to go about this. He knows he should… prepare Bucky, somehow. Knows it’s not the same as it would be with a woman and he’ll need something to slick the way. He eyes the mess on Bucky's lower stomach speculatively for a moment and reaches out, swiping his fingers through the stickiness. Deeming it good enough, he dips his slick fingers between Bucky’s legs, finding the most intimate part of him. Bucky’s skin is hot to the touch and, *God,* touching him *there* is… It feels unbelievably illicit, sinful, but in the most thrilling way possible. Yeah, Steve is definitely going to hell.

At the touch, Bucky lets out a sound like he’s been punched, his entire body jolting. “Yes,” he moans, “come on.”

Pressing one finger into Bucky's shaking body causes Bucky to let out a sigh of relief and Steve’s cock to drool helplessly in his pants, the feeling of that hot clutch around his finger already better than anything he could’ve imagined. He’s quick to add a second finger, responding to Bucky’s pleas for more, before pressing in a third and widening them, trying to focus on simply getting him stretched out enough for it not to hurt when he – Oh, Christ, Steve can’t think about that right now, or he’ll come on the spot.

When Bucky starts to try and fuck himself on Steve’s fingers, Steve figures he’s done enough. He pulls his fingers out, ignoring Bucky’s protests for the moment. He stands quickly, zipping off the top of his uniform, which leaves him in his undershirt and shield harness, before opening his pants with shaky fingers.

He tries not to think about Bucky’s eyes on him, the way his gaze is almost hungry, as he tugs down his pants and takes himself out of his underwear. The long overdue touch on his aching cock makes him shiver, and he can't help but give himself a few tight strokes, just to take the edge of. Despite still being sticky with his earlier release, Steve isn’t prepared to take any chances with Bucky’s comfort, so he spits into his palm, biting back a moan as he spreads the moistness along his shaft.

“Steve,” Bucky groans, “come on.”

“Bucky,” Steve says, dropping to his knees between Bucky’s legs and lining himself up. “Are you *sure* –”

“Do it,” Bucky grits out, his hair sticking to his forehead with sweat. “*Now.*”

Steve exhales, and obliges.

The first push into the tight, scorching heat of Bucky’s body feels like how the ecstasy of Saint Teresa always looked to Steve. His eyes roll back just like hers, and he knows he should go slow, let Bucky adjust – but Bucky’s legs wrap, vise-like, around his hips, pulling him in,

and Steve helplessly sinks into him in one smooth thrust. When he bottoms out, a moan echoes through the cabin that could've come from either or both of them.

“Oh, God,” Steve breathes, just as Bucky hisses, “*Yes*. Oh fuck, yes. *Move.*”

“Yeah,” Steve agrees breathlessly, pulling back and pushing in again.

It feels indescribable, Bucky feels *incredible,* unlike anything Steve’s felt before. The worry that he’ll hurt him makes Steve careful at first, but when it becomes clear Bucky still needs more, he gradually allows himself to speed up. He's still holding back, though -- right until the way Bucky moans Steve’s name when Steve accidentally slams into him a little harder than he intended makes the last of his already fragile restraint finally crumble. Steve lets go, allowing himself to get lost in the mindblowing pleasure of it, in the feeling of being closer to Bucky than he's ever been.

There's still a tiny part of him that's aware that they should at least try to keep it down, but a much bigger, more persuasive part of him is dead set on making Bucky scream with pleasure as loudly as possible. He's already well on his way – Bucky responds beautifully to Steve’s every thrust, spurring Steve on, his right hand grabbing Steve's ass to pull him in even deeper.

“Yeah, that's – *oh*,” Bucky yells, his metal hand slamming down palm-down on the floor. “Oh, *Steve.*”

By now, Steve is clenching his jaw so hard with the effort of holding back his impending orgasm it’s making his teeth creak, but he already knows it will make no difference. This big body of his is always on a hair trigger and this is hardly that. This is him buried balls-deep inside of his best friend whom he’s loved since forever, and Steve doesn't stand a chance in hell.

“Bucky,” he groans. “I can't – 'S too much, I'm sorry.”

Bucky’s fingers dig harder into his flesh, urging him to speed up even more, thrust even harder. “*Yes*, Steve – give it –”

Shoving into him another handful of times, Steve shouts, his vision whiting out as he comes so hard it kind of feels like dying. It goes on and on forever, wave after wave washing over him, and when his vision finally clears, he realizes Bucky is whimpering, still rolling his hips insistently.

“Don't stop,” Bucky begs. “Steve – don't stop, keep going, please.”

It would take a much stronger man than Steve to deny such a request. He's still hard anyway, still wanting, needing more too, so he doesn't need to be asked twice. He eagerly pushes back in, groaning when he realizes how wet Bucky is now – wet with Steve’s come, dripping out of him and slicking the way.

“Oh fuck,” he gasps, overwhelmed. “*Bucky.*”

“Steve – harder, *please.*”

Steve does as he's told and puts his back into it. He fucks Bucky harder still, burying himself inside of him again and again. Now that Bucky's stopped sounding less pained and more like he’s overwhelmed with pleasure, Steve can't help the thrill he feels, deep down.

He's giving Bucky pleasure. He's giving him what he needs, and Bucky is enthusiastically letting him know his approval. It makes Steve's blood sing, to finally be able to be there for Bucky, to provide for him. To make him feel so good he'll forget all the bad things that ever happened to him, if even for a moment. He feels filled with purpose in a way he hasn't felt even in battle for the longest time, his one goal to satisfy Bucky so thoroughly that he'll finally be able to rest once this is over. It infuses him with fire, makes him angle his thrusts the way that has Bucky gasping for air every time.

Bucky throws his head back, the tendons in his neck stretching taut just as his body is stretched around Steve’s cock; clutching at him, pulling him in again and again. Tears are leaking from the corners of Bucky’s eyes and his metal fingers push into the floor of the quinjet to brace himself against the force of Steve’s thrusts, scratching along the surface forcefully enough to leave grooves. He's practically screaming by now, loud and uninhibited. Steve spares another fleeting thought for their teammates on the other side of that flimsy door, but right now, he just can’t bring himself to care. All he cares about is Bucky, Bucky, *Bucky*.

Bucky suddenly surges up, giving Steve no warning whatsoever before smashing their mouths together and kissing him hard. Steve instantly moans into it, returning the kiss hungrily. Somehow, it feels almost more intimate than everything else that’s happening. Kissing Bucky Barnes is everything Steve always dreamed it would be, and he never wants to stop. They *don't* stop, not except to draw a breath and whimper each other's names – they just kiss and fuck and fuck and kiss, lost in a desperate haze of need and lust, until Steve’s lost count of how many times they've both come.

It feels so good, so *right*, that for a while, Steve forgets that what is happening is born out of necessity instead of choice. Right now, it feels like they *both* want this. Like they're just two people desperately craving each other, and for the first time, Steve almost believes the love he's been cherishing might not be as one sided as he's always thought.

“Bucky… Buck, I –”

“Yes,” Bucky says, just as breathlessly. “*Steve.*”

There’s something about the way Bucky says his name, like he’s feeling it too, this thing that is consuming Steve. Just the possibility of it is enough to light Steve up from the inside, makes him lean down and claim Bucky’s mouth in another searing kiss that Bucky eagerly reciprocates.

“Buck,” Steve pants, “am I – is this good? Are you –”

“*Yes.* Yes, ‘s so good, Steve. So good, keep –”

“Yeah? Still need me to keep goin’?”

Bucky nods frantically. “One more, just one more time, please, I –”

"Sshh,” Steve murmurs against his lips, “I got you. One more, I got you.”

And so one more time, Steve gives it his all, fucking Bucky on that unforgiving quinjet floor like their lives depend on it – it’s not even all that far from the truth. Bucky wraps his legs around Steve’s waist, his cock gliding wetly along the ridges of Steve’s abs while his hands clutch at his back with a fervor bordering on frenzy. Steve slams into him over and over, angling his thrusts just right, and feels it this time when Bucky starts to tense up again. His breath comes in quick, short bursts as the pleasure builds to a final crescendo inside of him, and suddenly, Steve finds himself teetering on the edge again too, ready to snap as soon as Bucky –

And there it is -- Bucky’s eyes roll back, his back arching sharply, mouth going slack. He's stunning in his climax, everything Steve's ever wanted, and with an animalistic grunt, Steve lets himself fall, emptying himself inside of Bucky one last time. It’s nearly too much, the pleasure so pure and sharp it's almost painful. He thinks he might be crying – or maybe that’s Bucky, he’s not sure. He doesn’t know where he ends and Bucky begins at this point, so what does it matter anyway?

After, it takes a long while for his surroundings to filter back into Steve's consciousness. When they finally do, his first thought is, of course, for Bucky.

Bucky, who’s gone totally lax underneath him, eyes closed and a blissful expression on his flushed, sweaty face. He looks completely fucked out – so utterly spent and deeply satisfied that it makes a primal sort of answering gratification spread through Steve's chest.

“Bucky?”

Bucky's only reply is a low hum.

“Are you alright?”

“Mhm.”

“I’m going to move now, alright?” Steve says, bracing himself, not waiting for a reply this time before slowly, very carefully pulling out. He sucks in a breath through his teeth at the overstimulation, and Bucky groans softly, but otherwise doesn’t react. On shaky legs, Steve gets up, wiping himself off with a discarded towel and tucking himself back into his pants, before he sets about cleaning Bucky up too. It’s cursory at best, but it’ll have to do for now.

He somehow manages to get Bucky’s pants back on, then makes him drink some water from a bottle that Steve holds to his lips. As soon as he's drained the bottle, Bucky seems to have one last burst of energy, which he uses to drag Steve back down to the floor. He hums contentedly, rubbing his face against Steve's chest when Steve lies down and lets Bucky use him as a pillow.

“Do you need anything?” Steve asks, watching Bucky’s face. He’s not asleep quite yet, but it’s a close thing.

“You,” Bucky murmurs sleepily, burrowing deeper into Steve’s hold.

Steve’s heart expands so quickly, so massively, that it feels like it’s going to break his ribs from the inside out. Maybe Bucky doesn’t quite know what he’s saying right now, and maybe he doesn’t mean it quite the way Steve wants him to. But at least, right here, right now, Bucky needs him. Right now, he can be useful. He closes his eyes, leaning down to press a kiss to the top of Bucky's head.

“I’m here,” he whispers gruffly. “Not goin’ anywhere. Get some sleep, Buck.”

Bucky's breathing evens out, slower and slower until he starts to snore, very softly. It’s the best sound Steve has ever heard.

—

He must fall asleep too at some point, because he's awoken sometime later by Natasha's voice calling his name.

Steve lifts his head, instantly alert. A quick glance down confirms that Bucky’s eyes are still closed, his mouth slack and breathing even. Steve clears his throat and looks up – he can't see Natasha, but the door to the cockpit is cracked open. “Yeah?” he calls quietly.

“Are you decent?” Natasha asks.

Steve flushes, instantly and terribly. Recent events rush back to him in technicolor and surround sound, making him wince. What had seemed insignificant in the heat of the moment – their teammates hearing him and Bucky fuck literally just on the other side of the cockpit door, not caring one bit about how loud they were being – suddenly seems very, very significant indeed.

“Um. Yeah, we're decent.”

“I'm coming in, okay?”

“Okay.”

Natasha emerges, her eyes sweeping over them where they're lying on the floor. While he's grateful they're no longer as exposed as before, he’s very aware of the fact that they're still cuddled up close, Bucky wrapped in Steve’s arms, his head resting on Steve's chest.

“Is he –?”

“Fine,” Steve confirms, face feeling hotter than the surface of the sun. “Asleep.”

Natasha nods. “And you?”

“I'm okay, I think. I just…” He trails off, giving Natasha a helpless look. The look she gives him in return makes him strongly suspect she knows everything he's not saying anyway.

“Well, ETA is in about ten minutes, so better get ready.”

Sam, Clint and Bruce emerge not long after Natasha assures them that the coast is clear. Although everyone acts like nothing's happened, Steve notices how they're all avoiding looking at the heap of Steve-and-Bucky on the floor. Steve can't blame them; he'd be freaked out in their position, too.

Even with people talking and shuffling around him, Bucky doesn't wake up. He just continues to sleep soundly in Steve's arms, and while it’s nice, it’s also so unlike the Bucky he’s used to that it's almost a little worrying.

“Bruce?”

Bruce turns towards them, though he’s still looking at a point somewhere over Steve's head when he asks, “Everything okay, Steve?”

“Fine,” Steve says automatically, “just, uh. Bucky, he's… is it normal that he’s this out of it? Should I be worried?”

“I don't think so,” Bruce replies. “He's exhausted and his body is working through the last of the drugs, so it's using all its energy for recovery. The others I've seen this happened to slept for about forty-eight hours straight, after…” He clears his throat. “Well, you know.”

“And they were fine? When they woke up?”

Bruce nods, smiling reassuringly. “A little worse for wear and a lot spooked, but they got lucky. It could've been a lot worse if Hydra had gotten their hands on them.” He doesn’t say the same if not more so goes for Bucky, but Steve hears it nonetheless.

Steve nods, relieved. “So, uh, should I take him to the med bay when we arrive, to have him checked over?”

Bruce shakes his head. “As long as he's asleep, he should be alright. I doubt anything could wake him for a while.” He frowns a little. “And I’m not sure I'm comfortable having him examined without his express permission.”

Steve's stomach jolts. “God, no, of course not. I just thought –”

“I know, Steve.” Bruce gives him another small smile, finally meeting his eyes. “But yeah, I'd say take him back to your floor and put him to bed, let him sleep it off. When he wakes, make sure he drinks and eats something. Once he feels up to it, have him come down to see me and we'll check him over. Does that sound okay?”

“Yes,” Steve sighs. “That sounds great, Bruce. Thank you.”

Once the jet has touched down on the roof of the tower and the doors have opened, Bucky is still out cold, so Steve carefully disentangles himself from his hold before scooping him up, bridal style, and carrying him out. The daylight feels shockingly bright and incongruent after hours on the jet, after everything that happened; though when he looks down and sees the way the sunlight illuminates Bucky's sleeping features, Steve's heart thuds heavily in his chest. Bucky is still so beautiful, even unconscious, sweat-drenched and a little filthy, and Steve loves him, loves him, *loves him*.

It's a testament to the severity of the situation that Tony doesn't even make any off-color remarks when they all go their separate ways. He just throws them a quick salute and stalks off in the direction of his private elevator without a word.

"Get some rest," Bruce says, briefly squeezing Steve's shoulder. "You'll be alright."

Natasha sends him a brief but genuine smile. "You need anything, I'm just a floor away."

"What she said," Sam adds, from their right. "Lemme know if you wanna go for a run tomorrow, or talk or anything at all, alright?"

"Thanks, guys," Steve says, a wave of gratitude washing over him. "Really, thank you."

"Tell him he knows where to find me," Clint offers finally. "If he needs to like, you know, shoot things. Or talk, whatever." He walks off before Steve can thank him again.

As Steve approaches the elevator, the doors open automatically.

"Sergeant Barnes' floor first, Captain Rogers?" JARVIS asks.

Steve considers his options. On the one hand, Bucky might feel safer in his own place, but then again, Steve is going to have to stay with him to make sure he's okay, and he still isn't entirely sure Bucky is comfortable with having him in his private space. Plus, Bucky's fridge rarely contains anything more than some milk and eggs, while Steve happens to have stocked his just the other day.

"My own floor please," he decides. "Thank you, JARVIS."

"Very well, Captain."

Inside his apartment, Steve carries Bucky to his bedroom and gently, very carefully, lays him down on his bed.

For a moment, he just stands there, drinking in the sight of Bucky sleeping peacefully, no trace of tension left on his face. He looks so much younger like this, relaxed and soft, and if it wasn't for the long hair and all the leather, he'd look just like he did before the war, before everything. Steve takes a deep breath, fit to burst with feelings far too huge for his body to contain, nevermind that it's much bigger now than it used to be. It's overwhelming, especially after everything that's happened today – but one thing that stands out among the jumble of conflicting feelings roiling around his body is a timid, cautious hope. He doesn't dare dwell on it, because there's no telling what will actually happen once Bucky finally wakes up, but it

sticks in his chest like a tiny, stubborn flame while he goes about doing what needs to be done.

First, he quickly undresses and jumps into the shower, scrubbing himself clean in two minutes flat. Once he's dried off, he puts on some clean sweats and a t-shirt before rejoining a still sleeping Bucky in the bedroom. Getting Bucky, who is essentially a dead weight, out of his tac gear takes some doing, but Steve manages it. He throws the soiled garments aside, then sets about cleaning Bucky up properly with a warm, damp cloth. He's as careful as he can be, washing Bucky's face, his hands, both flesh and metal, gently brushing his hair back from his forehead. It's a soothing task, and once he's done, Steve dresses Bucky in some of Steve's own soft, worn pajama pants and a t-shirt. Quickly dashing back into the main part of the apartment, he grabs a few bottles of water and some snacks from the fridge and places them on his bedside table.

Finally, he pulls the covers over Bucky, gently tucking them around him, before lying down next to him, on top of the covers. Steve exhales, letting the day's tension slowly drain from his limbs. He's tired, yet somehow wired at the same time. He tells himself he should try to get some proper sleep too, but when he turns his head and is confronted anew with the breathtaking sight of Bucky sleeping soundly in his bed, Steve gives up on the pretense. Turning on his side, he uses his bicep as a makeshift pillow since Bucky is using Steve's, and just… watches Bucky sleep.

Once again, he marvels at how strong Bucky is, how incredibly resilient. He shouldn't have to be, of course. But when fate had other plans for him, he asked for Steve's help and Steve gave him what he needed, and they got through it together. For the first time in a long while, Steve feels like maybe, just maybe, things will be okay between them.

Eventually, Bucky's warmth and steady breathing lull him into a deep, dreamless sleep.

—

When he wakes up again – several hours later, judging by the waning light coming in through the windows – it's to the feeling of someone watching him. He opens his eyes and finds that Bucky is awake now too, looking at him with an unreadable expression on his face.

"Hey," Steve murmurs, blinking himself awake all the way. "How do you feel?"

Bucky's throat bobs as he swallows, his tongue darting out to wet his lips. "Thirsty," he says, almost more of a croak than a word.

When he tries to sit up, Steve quickly sits up too, grabbing him a bottle of water from the bedside table. Once Bucky has drunk all of it, he follows it up with one of those high-calorie, high-protein bars they use on missions, which Bucky dutifully eats under Steve's watchful gaze.

“Better?” Steve asks, once Bucky has swallowed the last of it.

Bucky nods. He's quiet for a moment, before clears his throat and asks, “What happened?”

From one moment to the next, Steve’s insides turn cold. “You – you don't remember?”

“No, I do,” Bucky amends. “I just mean, how did I get here?” He casts a glance around him. “In… your bed?”

“Oh.” Steve flushes, his relief just about outweighing his embarrassment. “I carried you here from the quinjet. You fell asleep, after…” He trails off with an awkward cough, clutching the back of his neck.

“Right. And I'm wearing… your pajamas?”

Steve’s flush deepens. “Oh, yeah. Sorry. It's just, your gear was all, uh, dirty. I just thought you'd be more comfortable in some clean clothes. I didn't mean to –”

“Steve, it's fine. It's nice.” Bucky almost smiles for a moment, before his expression grows serious again. “Thank you,” he says quietly. “For all of it.”

“Buck…”

“I mean it. I don't know what I'd have done without you.”

“Well, I’m glad I could help.” Steve draws a breath, casting his eyes down before adding, “And I’m sorry.”

“For what?”

“All of it,” Steve says, swallowing down the bile in his throat. “The fact that this happened to you at all. The fact that I know you don’t – you wouldn’t have chosen this. Me. So, yeah. I'm sorry.”

Bucky remains quiet for a long moment. He runs a hand over his stubbled jaw, looking thoughtful. “I remember you saying…. You kept telling me that it wasn’t my fault. What happened. Did you mean that?”

“Of course,” Steve tells him fervently. “None of this was your fault, Bucky. This is all on Hydra, they did this to you, against your will. No one doubts that, okay? Least of all me.”

“I know,” Bucky nods, and there’s that glimpse of ancient sadness in his eyes again, the one Steve has become all too familiar with. “So if it was all Hydra’s fault, then why are you sorry, Steve?”

“Because I should’ve –”

“Should’ve what?” Bucky asks, suddenly sharp. “Been able to predict the future, to prevent the whole thing from happening? Taken down that base single-handedly before some asshole

could throw crazy gas at my head?" Something flashes in his eyes. "Or been the one to get hit instead?"

Steve clenches his jaw. "I should've stopped it. Should've *protected* you this time. I promised myself, Buck. When you came back, I made a vow to myself that I wouldn't let them get anywhere near you ever again, and I –"

Bucky huffs in frustration. "Steve, I *chose* to join the team. I chose to go back into the field, into the lion's den. You think I didn't know they'd probably find some way to hurt me again?" He shakes his head. "You really think I'm that naive?"

"But –"

"No," Bucky cuts him off. "I was aware of the risks but I chose to do it anyway, because I figured the possibility of wiping out Hydra for good outweighed the possibility of getting hurt again. That was my decision – mine to make, not yours. And don't pretend you'd do any different, either." His gaze grows shrewd. "Unless you think I can't be trusted to make my own decisions?"

"No," Steve balks, eyes widening, "Bucky, *of course* you – how can you even –"

"So if I'm allowed to make my own decisions, stupid ones included, then why would it be your responsibility to protect me from the consequences?"

"You've always had my six," Steve argues miserably, "and I couldn't even –"

"Steve," Bucky breaks in again, more gentle now. "I know you don't wanna hear this, but I need you to listen to me, for once in your damn life. And let me finish before you say anything, okay?"

He reaches out to put his right, flesh and bone hand on Steve's shoulder, and Steve soaks up the contact like a dried-up sponge soaks up water.

"You are not always going to be able to stop me from getting hurt," Bucky tells him, holding Steve's gaze. "You're just not, alright? Lord knows I couldn't stop your punk ass from getting into trouble back in the day either, much as I wished I could've. But what I *could* do was be there for you when you were hurting. I could listen to your rants and patch you up and, hell, make you that godawful cabbage soup you liked for some reason. I could make sure you knew you weren't alone." He squeezes again, his hand warm and heavy on Steve's shoulder. "That's what you did, Steve. On the jet. You were there for me when I needed you. You calmed me down, and you held me and told me things were going to be okay, and –" He breaks off, shaking his head. "I know you, pal, and I know you did as much as you possibly could have. So why the hell would you think you need to apologize?"

It's the most Steve has probably heard Bucky say at once since before the war, the most he's sounded like himself since that fateful day in the Alps, and despite the fact that there's a lump in his throat the size of a baseball, Steve forces himself to answer.

"Because you don't want me near you anymore."

Bucky inhales audibly. “What?”

“It’s alright,” Steve says, lowering his gaze. “But it’s true, isn’t it? You’ve been avoiding me lately. You never want to be alone in a room with me, you don’t want me to touch you. You – you don’t even talk to me anymore, not really.” Steve clears his throat, briskly wiping at his eyes. “So I’m sorry you had to call on me for help this time, that’s all. I’m sorry you didn’t have a choice.”

And lord, he knows he should probably stop there, preserve at least *some* dignity, but now that he’s started, he can’t seem to keep the words from tumbling out of him.

“And I get that this isn’t about me, I do, but Bucky… All I’ve wanted to do since you came back is *help*, in whatever way you needed, but these past few months, you’ve made it clear that you didn’t need or want my help. Didn't seem to need me around at all, to be honest. It’s fine,” Steve says quickly, when he sees Bucky open his mouth to argue. “It’s a good thing. I’m happy you’ve made so much progress, Buck, I really am, and you don’t owe me an explanation, I just –” He draws an unsteady breath, mortified to find that his voice cracks when he finishes, “I just miss you.”

Bucky’s eyes are wide and stricken, before he closes them and swallows hard. “Steve… I’m sorry.”

“It’s fine,” Steve repeats, his heart already breaking –

“It’s not,” Bucky interrupts. “I should’ve known…” He takes an unsteady breath. “Just let me explain, alright? I want to.” He waits for Steve to nod before he continues. “Look, I know we haven't really talked about this much, but I've been recovering a lotta memories over the last few months. More and more every day. Stuff from before, mostly. Stuff they tried to make me forget.”

“That's great, Buck,” Steve tells him, dredging up a genuine smile from somewhere, because despite everything else, that *is* great news. Bucky reclaiming his life, one memory at a time.

“For the most part, yeah. But the thing is…” Bucky takes another deep breath. “The thing is, I also started remembering some things that I didn't know what to do with. Stuff that I needed some time to figure out on my own, because I wasn’t sure…” He shakes his head. “I just thought it’d be better if I kept my distance for a little while. I didn't realize you'd notice. Not enough to make you think I didn't want to be around you anymore, anyway.”

Steve chokes out a wet laugh. “Well, how could I not? I kinda care about you a lot, you jerk.” He sighs, running a hand through his hair. “I just didn't know what to think. Thought maybe I'd been pushing you too hard, trying to get you to remember, or maybe you finally figured out I –” He breaks off, closing his mouth abruptly.

Bucky doesn’t push, just keeps looking at him so intently it’s making Steve want to fidget.

“Do you remember,” Bucky says finally, “a few months ago. You came back from a run and you drank a whole carton of juice, standing by the fridge, and then you used the hem of your shirt to wipe the sweat off your face?”

Steve blinks, wondering why Bucky would bring that up now. “Yeah. And you had a dissociative episode and walked off, shut yourself in your room for hours.”

Bucky lets out a soft snort. “A dissociative episode? That’s what you thought?”

Steve frowns. “Wasn't it? You just… zoned out all of a sudden. Your eyes went all glassy, and you just turned around and left.”

“Yeah,” Bucky huffs. “Only I, uh, I wasn't dissociating. I just – had a thought. It caught me off guard, and I needed some time to… think.” He looks up, and there’s something in his eyes that makes Steve go still.

“What was the thought?” Steve asks, finding himself holding his breath.

“That I wanted to lick the sweat off of you.”

All at once, the breath Steve had been holding leaves him in a rush. His stomach swoops dangerously, like the floor’s suddenly disappeared from under him. “What?” he asks weakly.

“I wanted to lick the sweat right off your stomach and then get on my knees and –” Bucky bites his lip, averting his eyes. “It startled me, how much I wanted that. And after that, the memories came flooding back. All these memories of how I used to watch you, think about you. About touching you.”

Steve can't speak. He’s not even sure he knows how to breathe anymore. All he can do is sit there and stare at Bucky, feeling a lot like he’s having an out of body experience.

“I realized that was another thing Hydra had taken from me. The knowledge of how much I used to want you, *all the time*, and then I thought, well, maybe that was one thing we would have been better off had I not remembered.”

“Why?” Steve manages to whisper.

“Plenty of reasons.” Bucky smiles wistfully. “I knew, you know. That you’ve been dying to help. It’s just who you are. Even if I hadn’t already known that before I even figured out who *I* was, you weren’t exactly subtle about it, pal. It was comin’ offa you in *waves*. And I get it, I do. But I suppose I was just scared that if you knew how I felt, you might – I don’t know. Put my feelings above your own, I guess.” He shakes his head. “I just didn’t want to put you in that position. You're enough of a self-effacing idiot as it is.”

“Bucky –”

“But I was worried for myself, too,” Bucky barrels on, determined despite looking almost nervous now. “Once I realized how long I’d been hiding it, the way I am, the way I’ve always been…” He takes a breath, running shaky fingers through his long hair. “Steve, I spent most of my life scared shitless. Scared of who – of what I was. Scared of how much I wanted you, of losing you, of you thinking differently of me, if you knew. I didn’t think you’d hate me for it, but I also knew you weren’t like me, and I just didn’t think I could bear it if you’d ever even so much as flinched away from me when I touched you.” Bucky pauses, licking his lips

before looking up to meet Steve's eyes. "But today, you didn't – I mean, maybe I'm wrong but… you didn't seem disgusted, exactly."

Steve would laugh at the understatement if he weren't so preoccupied with trying not to lose his mind.

"I wasn't," he says, heart in his throat. "Or, I was, but not with you. I was disgusted with myself, for wanting – because I knew *you* didn't want –"

"Yeah, well," Bucky says, the corner of his mouth turning up. "Guess neither of us knew shit, huh?"

They look at each other for a long moment, something unspoken passing between them that has Steve feeling lightheaded with the possibility of it all. He sniffs noisily, blinking against the stinging in his eyes. "Jerk."

"Punk," Bucky shoots back with unmistakable fondness. "Listen, what happened on the jet, it was – well, it was weird as hell, that's for sure. Definitely not like how I imagined it happening." There's a glint in his eye that makes Steve's heart speed up another notch. "I always imagined something a little more… romantic, you know? Like me gettin' you some pretty flowers, maybe, or taking you out for dinner. Something nice, like you deserve, to butter you up so you'd finally let me kiss you."

Steve isn't sure what his face is doing, but it must be something, because Bucky's eyes grow impossibly soft as he brings hand up to his face to cup his jaw, and Steve can't *breathe.*

"But in some ways," Bucky says quietly, "today was perfect. The way you took care of me... Despite everything, you made me feel so safe, Steve. You always do, but this was –" He slowly shakes his head. "I didn't just feel like you were doing what needed to be done. I felt cherished, *wanted,* and that's when I thought… Maybe. Maybe I was wrong."

"You were," Steve breathes, eyes closing as Bucky's thumb caresses his cheek. "You were wrong, Bucky, you have to know –"

Bucky shushes him gently. "Look at me, Steve."

Bucky's eyes are so blue, bluer than Steve's ever seen them – but what's more, they're shining with something Steve's never dared to imagine, not even in his wildest dreams. He's enthralled by it, captivated, and though Bucky gives Steve plenty of time to stop him when he leans in, Steve couldn't move if he wanted to.

Bucky's lips are warm and soft, so soft against his own. Steve sighs into it, his eyes closing again of their own accord. Bucky is so gentle, achingly tender, pressing soft, sweet kisses to Steve's mouth, his jaw, his cheeks. It's so much, and it makes something huge and buoyant well up in Steve's chest, the knowledge that Bucky wants this, too. That *Bucky wants him back.*

When the choked-off sound that's been building in Steve's chest finally escapes, Bucky pulls back half an inch, lips just brushing Steve's cheek. "'S okay," he murmurs. "It's okay,

c’mere.” Slinging an arm around Steve’s shoulders, Bucky drags him down on the bed, hugging him close to his chest.

Steve buries his face in Bucky’s neck, breathing him in – and, oh, the scent of him, now even more intimately familiar than before. It sends a jolt of of desire through him, images of the two of them intertwined on the floor of the quinjet flashing through his mind. He chases it, that scent, mouthing at the underside of Bucky’s jaw, the soft spot behind his ear.

“God, Steve.” Bucky sounds as stunned and awed as Steve feels. “I can't believe – You really mean it, don’t you? You really want this, too.”

“I want you,” Steve says, pressing the words into Bucky’s clavicle, right into his skin and bone. “I’ve always wanted you, Bucky, every part of you, in every way I can think of. I don’t even know what not wanting you feels like.”

“Oh, sweetheart.” Bucky lets out a shaky sigh. “I can’t tell you how much I wish you’d told me that sooner.”

The pet name is almost more than Steve can bear right now, making his heart stutter much like it used to before the serum magically fixed his long list of ailments. He sighs too, burying his nose deeper into Bucky’s neck. “Yeah. Yeah, I know. But I’m tellin’ you now, ain’t I?”

“Yeah,” Bucky breathes, pressing a kiss to the top of Steve’s head. “Yeah.”

They drift for a while, basking in the closeness, the wonder of it, before Bucky speaks again.

“I love you,” he says, soft and low, like a confession. “You know that, right? I love you so bad sometimes it feels like it’s burning a hole right through my chest. Like I just can't breathe properly when you’re not around, it's –”

“I love you, too,” Steve whispers back, just as ardently. “I love you so damn much, Buck.” He swallows hard against the lump in his throat. “Stay with me, Buck. Please? Just – stay with me, okay?”

“As long as you'll have me, sweetheart.”

“Forever, then.”

“Yeah,” Bucky smiles against Steve’s lips. “Forever sounds good to me.”

End Notes

Thanks for reading! Come and shout with me about these two on Tumblr if you want!

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